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Thinking About the Future of the Navy

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In the years since World War II, aviation has emerged as the Navy's primary element. It is the area in which we are farthest ahead of the Soviet Navy, and it represents our only effective means of responding at great distance and quickly to new long-range missile threats. Naval aviation is vital to protecting our convoys and military forces at sea; vital to denying an enemy free use of the sea; and vital to projecting power by means of amphibious assault and air strikes.

Because this is the case, all segments of the Navy bear great responsibility to prepare naval aviation soundly for the future. To do that well, there must exist a strategic concept, an objective, an understanding of what aviation must be prepared to do in the next two decades for the Navy to fulfill its role in national security. In what circumstances will the role of naval aviation be sea control? In what circumstances will it be power projection? Will the same aviation Navy be able to fulfill the needs of both functions?

I start with the fundamental premise that sea control is the primary role for naval aviation. Twice in this century, in World Wars I and II, the vital security of the United States was challenged by the potential loss of Europe to hostile forces. Our ability to maintain control of the North Atlantic sea-lanes against a formidable and determined German U-boat threat permitted us to resupply our European Allies and to move our own forces and supplies to the battle zones. The Allied victory in the Battle of the Atlantic was decisive in our ability to turn back the tide of aggression on the continent of Europe. Today, aside from the strategic role of our nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, keeping sea-lanes open remains the single most important reason for having a navy. The most important sea-lanes remain those of the Atlantic.

We tend not to think about the control of sea-lanes very much anymore, and some even denigrate its importance. We talk today of the unlikelihood of a third prolonged, conventional war in Europe, hence of ever having to wrest control of the Atlantic again. But that is far from an original insight. The short-

war thesis was the conventional wisdom in 1914 and again in 1939. It was wrong both times. Another war in Europe may well be over in less than 30 days. If so, control of the Atlantic will be irrelevant. But, if war comes to Europe and if our short-war prediction is not correct, both sides will immediately focus their entire effort on the North Atlantic umbilical. It would be very unwise to build the U. S. Navy on the assumption that we can predict whether a war will be long or short. That choice may very well not be ours to make. If that estimate should prove wrong, and if the Navy were not ready to maintain a sustained sea control effort, the country's basic security would be at risk. All Chiefs of Naval Operations, all Secretaries of Defense know in their inner recesses that being able to meet the threat to our use of the sea is the core reason for having a navy. And if war comes, they will not be likely to divert the Navy to any other task until this key issue is resolved.

Yet, despite the importance of sea control, since World War II the only combatant use of the U. S. Navy has been in power projection in the Third World. Unfortunately, this tends to hypnotize us and for years has caused us to try to fit our naval power projection capabilities into our military strategy for war in Europe. It will not work. The contribution of power projection by the Navy to a major war in Europe can be only marginal. It is marginal first because of sheer numbers. The number of aircraft which we can bring to bear from the sea is insignificant in comparison with available land-based tactical aircraft. It is marginal secondly because for mutual defense it would require three or four carriers in any high-risk area where we would have to go to check power on the continent. No Chief of Naval Operations or Secretary of Defense would risk one half to two thirds of the Atlantic Fleet carrier force for a peripheral force augmentation of this kind.

Many people do not agree that carriers are essential to winning the battle for sea control. Too often sea

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contro Approved For Release 2007/10/19 : CIA-RDP99-00498R000300050004-3 ability to get there and be able to stay there. Second, we need the ability to put forces ashore—to control some of the territory if necessary. Third, we need the ability to use air power to defend forces that have been inserted and to conduct air strikes. Only the Navy and the Marine Corps can do these jobs. While the Army and the Air Force can help, our sister services will always be peripheral forces in this oceanic theater because of the territorial inhibitions I have already mentioned.

It is a long way around the periphery of the Indian Ocean from the Strait of Malacca, to India, down the East Coast of Africa, to the Cape of Good Hope. To cover this area we will need lots of carriers and lots of amphibious ships. Without numbers, the odds of being close enough to a crisis are too low. Ships are slow in terms of political decision-making. If one makes a political decision today, even if the whole naval task force can sustain a speed of 20 knots, it takes more than 22 days to steam from Norfolk to the Persian Gulf. It is even farther for a Sixth Fleet carrier from the Eastern Mediterranean. The primary characteristic for carriers, then, is quantity.

How do we get a lot of carriers? We get them—perhaps 24 carriers or more—by building them smaller with fewer and less sophisticated aircraft. Will smaller carriers and less sophisticated aircraft do the job? Yes. First, because sea control in the Atlantic and power projection in remote areas do not call for the great numbers of aircraft or weapons per deck with which we now operate. In neither case will we face the Vietnam practice of dumping large amounts of ordnance over long periods of time.

Secondly, we can go to lesser sophistication because power projection in the future will not require aircraft with performance as high as that in the past. We are surely approaching the day of real-time, remotely controlled, unmanned, electronic and photo sensors. Such sensors will allow us to remotely guide unmanned weapons to fixed or moving targets at any distance. Therefore, high-performance aircraft for penetrating and evading air defenses will be less necessary. We will simply stand off. Even for the air defense interceptor role, the day of the dog fight died with the AWG-9 radar and the Phoenix missile. Weapons will do the maneuvering in the future. Therefore, initially at least, we will need lots of Essex (CV-9)-size carriers with catapults, generating toward 25,000-ton carriers with vertical and short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) aircraft. There is a nice coincidence here. The proliferation of small carriers will help us to be where we need to be in the Indian Ocean in times short of general war, and the same carriers would be capable of shifting to the Atlantic in great numbers in time of general war.

More emphasis on sea control means not only that we need different kinds of carriers and aircraft, but it also means that we need to change our operating habits. We need increased flexibility in flight operations. We need to get away from cyclical operations and on to flexible deck operations. Who knows when more strike or interceptor aircraft might be needed? We need to get away from 12 hours on and 12 hours off flying and become self-sufficient throughout a 24-hour day because the threat will exist for 24 hours. If any skipper wants to count on his sister carriers to defend him for his 12 hours off, I think he will change his mind when the chips are down. We need to get away from thinking about air strikes and think in terms of maintaining and being able to

We need three capabilities to be ready to defend our interests in the Indian Ocean. First, we must be

augment a certain number of fighter antisubmarine aircraft stations around every carrier and having a quick-reaction attack aircraft potential.

I hardly expect unanimous agreement with this philosophy. I may well be wrong. Perhaps we do need large carriers and high-performance aircraft. There are certainly good reasons for them. Hulls are cheap, so why not build them big? Big decks are safer and more flexible. Plenty of fuel and supplies are needed when we must go deep into remote areas. Cutting down the logistics train is always desirable. The seakeeping qualities of large carriers are needed in the North Atlantic in winter. Large carriers are better for defending themselves than small. But notice please. These are all tactical arguments. Well the naval aviator may be concerned with them because of whose life will be at stake with the lesser performance aircraft and smaller carriers that I think we should have. But the first question, the key question, must be what the strategic concept is behind what is becoming a small force of large carriers with high-performance aircraft. What will the U. S. Navy need to accomplish in the 1980s and 1990s that will require *Nimitz* (CVN-68)-class ships that cannot be accomplished by smaller carriers? Only after we establish our strategic goals by defining the kinds and amounts of air power that we believe the nation will need from the sea can we address tactical issues like sea-keeping and self-defense.

Let me emphasize that cheap is not cost-effective if it will not do the job. Of all the arguments for large carriers, the best, in my opinion, is that it may take a large ship to handle all of the defensive weaponry that will be needed. But even with that argument in mind, I come down on the other side, on the side of numbers rather than size. Numbers give room for attrition. Numbers help confuse enemy targeting. Larger numbers mean smaller sizes which mean smaller radar and heat signatures to confuse enemy targeting. Highly miniaturized, lethal, defensive weapons are in the offing and will make a small carrier a viable defensive bet.

What then is the minimum-size carrier which is defensible under my strategic concept? What is the minimum size under your strategic concept? To make that judgment we must have a strategic concept to start with. A strategic concept is the foundation of logic which gives coherence to an otherwise complex and confusing plan of ship and plane sizes and types. It is a vital first step, not only for knowing exactly what we are going to be called upon to do in the years ahead, but for being able to sell those convictions to the Congress and to the American public so that an appropriate Navy can be adequately funded.

In the past decade, the Navy has dwindled from



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just less than 1,000 ships to about 450. It has gone from about 2,700 combat aircraft to about 1,700. But what is more important is that the rate of ship and aircraft procurement over the past decade will not sustain a Navy even as small as today's. All the talk of increasing the size of the Navy in the years ahead, and the projected funding level that has been sent to the Congress, is a loser. It is possible that there may be a temporary upsurge in numbers for a few years, but over the longer run, the mathematics of inadequate procurement spells shrinkage. If we take the number of ships that we have actually procured over the last ten years and which are programmed for the next five, it averages about 15 ships a year. Average ship life, minesweeper to carrier, is about 22 years; 22 times fifteen is 330. We are today, for the last decade, for the next five, planning to sustain a Navy of 330 ships. If 22 is too conservative, make it 25. You now have a 375-ship Navy. Stretch it to 30 years. You now have a 450-ship Navy, the same as we have today. We are not growing in ships, and the story in aircraft is much the same.

What this tells us in unequivocal terms is that the Congress of the United States and the American public do not believe that the United States requires a Navy of even 12 large carriers filled with sophisticated aircraft. They are not giving us the wherewithal to maintain such a Navy. I can only conclude that the strategic concept that we have used to support our requests for large carriers and their aircraft has not been persuasive. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of each of us who cares about our Navy and its role in the security of this country to address this issue of strategy.

If we do nothing, the Navy will continue to shrink, and naval strategy will have to shrink with it. Perhaps you will tend toward my strategy—strategic deterrence first, defense of the Atlantic sea-lanes second, and power projection in the Indian Ocean third—the first with ballistic missile submarines and cruise missiles, the latter two with larger numbers of less expensive carriers. But, it will be to no avail to buy those small ships and lower performance aircraft if they cannot do the job. So, perhaps instead you will want to refurbish the strategy for larger carriers and persuade the Congress that it should fund 12, 15, or 18 of them with full complements of high-performance aircraft. I submit, however, that after more than two decades of effort in that direction, we should recognize that it is an uphill battle. Whichever route you choose, defining the job to be done is the primary challenge we face. In my view, that is the heart of turning the corner on the decline of the U. S. Navy that we have witnessed in the past decade. The numbers clearly show that time is running out on the U. S. Navy and with it, the security of our country.